

29: Spiro--191-192
116, 159, 762, 115

(1947-48) 1950

Woleaians
Ifalik-1-7

"October 15, 1947. This morning Maroligar asked if he could use our [WPM: the author's] canoe. I, of course, gave him permission. When he returned, he explained that Tarev had tried to commit suicide by drowning. He had tied a rope around his neck, weighted stones to his feet, and was about to jump from his canoe into the lagoon when Maroligar and two other men stopped him. (This occurred a few days after the death of his wife.) Apparently he had had a trying night the night before, since he spent the entire night shouting and talking to himself. Among other things he had insisted that he was superior to the other people and that he was really an American. (8)

I asked Maroligar if I could speak to Tarev, and he was eager that I do so. When we arrived at the courtyard of his house, I noticed that all the women in the immediate area had departed because of their fear of him. When I peered into the house, he saw me immediately, and his face brightened. When I asked him to come out, saying that I

"8. The American is a person of high prestige and authority in this South Sea culture. It is difficult to say whether Tarev's insistence that he is an American is an outright delusion or rather a conscious attempt to identify with a 'reference group' of high status (the term is M. Sherif's)."

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Woleaians
Ifalik-2

would like to speak with him, he immediately complied with my request. I offered him a cigarette and asked him if he were happy. He replied that he was very sad because of the death of his wife. I asked him why he had tried to commit suicide, and he explained that all the people were speaking 'bad' (9) to him. Maroligar interrupted him to say that he was lying. My grasp of the language was inadequate to continue the interview without the aid of an interpreter, and I asked Maroligar to call Tom, our interpreter. I tried to talk with Tarev in Maroligar's absence, but he seemed in a kind of stupor, and I could not get through to him. He regained contact with reality when Tom arrived, and the following interview ensued.[192]

Q. Why did you try to kill yourself?

A. Because the people talk bad to me.

"9. At this point, I could obtain no exact reference for the word 'bad:'

"Q. What do they say?

A. My mother talks bad. [Actually his 'mother' is his maternal aunt, which, in this culture, is his classificatory mother. His biological parents are dead.]

Q. What does she say?

A. She says that my wife does not like her or her sister.

Q. Why?

A. [No answer.]

Q. Were you very sad today?

A. My wife died. I feel like smashing everything in the house, because my mother and her sister do not like my wife. My wife died and I am very sad. (10)

Q. But other men's wives die and they do not try to commit suicide. Why should you?

A. I don't like my mother or father or sister.

Q. Don't they feed you?

A. Yes, they give me good food, but they talk too much.

Q. What do they say?

A. The children listen to what my parents say about me, and they repeat it to me.

Q. What do they say about you?

A. My parents say that I am a chief.

"10. The native term for sad is eratu dipei, which literally translated means, my stomach feels bad."

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Woleaians
Ifalik-4

Q. Don't you like that?

A. I don't like what the children say to me.

Q. Don't you like to be called a chief?

A. They say that tree [pointing to it] does not belong to you, it belongs to us. The adults tell them to say that. [At this point, Maroligar interrupted to say that Tarev had accused him and his parents of wishing to fight him. He insisted that everything Tarev was saying was a lie. It was, of course, impossible to explain to him that Tarev was not 'lying' but was a victim of his own delusions.]

Q. Is it true, as people have told me, that an alus has possessed you?

A. Yes, the alus in the moon has entered my head and my stomach. [This convinced Tom and Maroligar even more that he was lying, because there is no alus in the moon.]

Q. How do you know that he has possessed you?

A. He came to my father. He [his father is actually dead] lives in another place. When he possessed my father, he possessed me.

Q. Where is your father?

A. Those pictures you showed me [the Rorschach cards], I like them very much. The place in the North, that's the place I see now.

Q. What place?

A. There's another one in the Northeast. This place in the North is very light.

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Woleaians
Ifalik-5

When I sit in my house, it's very dark; then, that North place, the one I like very much, comes on top of my head.

Q. How does it feel when it comes on top of your head?

A. I like it very much. When I pull up the blanket, I look underneath the sleeping mat, and smoke comes out. I then lower the mat and look underneath another one, and smoke comes out from it, too.

Q. What happens to you when the alus of the moon possesses you?

A. That man inside that padre book [the Bible that a missionary had shown him] and his mother come inside me.

Q. What does it feel like when they come inside you?

A. I don't know.

Q. Did they come inside you this morning, when you tried to commit suicide?

A. No.

Q. Did they come inside you last night?

A. The alus gave me something--something very fine.

Q. What did he give you?

A. Smoke. He put smoke inside my mouth, but it did not enter my stomach.

Q. You like that smoke?

A. I like it very much.

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Woleaians
Ifalik-6

Q. Why?

A. [No answer.]

Q. Does your head hurt you now?

A. I went to Falalap to wait for my wife. I waved my arms, and when I came back, I continued to do so.

Q. Don't you like it here?

A. Yes, I would like to remain. But I would like an American doll. (11)

Q. Why would you like one?

A. Because the Americans know everything. The people here are stupid.

Q. Do you want a carving of a man or a woman or a child?

A. Any kind.

Q. Would you like to go to America?

A. If you go, I want to go with you. I want to go any place you go.

"11. The native men carve small statuettes, which they trade for cigarettes and other trade-goods. By an American doll or statuette, he meant a similar carving of an American."

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Woleaians
Ifalik-7

By this time Tom and Maroligar were completely impatient with this 'crazy lie talk' and insisted on terminating the interview. I told Tarev that I would be unhappy if he committed suicide, and that if he felt like doing it again, he should first come to see me. He replied that his wife had 'gone into the ocean [where she was buried] and I want to go too.' "

29: Spiro--195
116, 159, 762

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Woleaians
Ifalik

"November 7, 1947. Yesterday while the men had all gone on a fishing trip, Tarev made another suicide attempt. He paddled into the lagoon, tied a rope to his foot, and tied rocks to the other end. A young man, who had been left behind to guard him, followed him; and when Tarev jumped into the lagoon, the man pulled him out. By this time, Maroligar had returned from fishing and asked Tarev to return to land. The latter refused, saying that Maroligar wanted to kill him (sic!). He was finally persuaded to return. (I was told all this secondhand, since I was on the other side of the island at the time. Unfortunately I did not have an opportunity to speak to Tarev after the incident.)"

"February 7, 1948 (aboard ship en route to Yap). The ship arrived yesterday to take us back. Tarev was the first to arrive at the tent to assist in the packing. He seemed calm though serious and slightly depressed, and kept constantly watching every movement I made. He asked if I were really leaving, and I said that I was. About half an hour later, a young boy shouted to me to come immediately to Tarev. He had gone to the lagoon and lay on his back in about two feet of water, refusing to allow the men to pull him out. By the time I arrived, he was half-drowned. I asked him to join me, which he did. I tried to reassure him that everything would be all right after I was gone, though he insisted that, now that I was leaving, the people would again try to kill him, and so on. He then smelled my hands and returned to his house in a deep depression. This is the last I saw of Tarev."